

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ARAE-00 INRE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 EB-07 OMB-01 TRSE-00 MC-02

ACDA-05 AID-05 IGA-02 COME-00 /073 W
----- 065513

O R 281343Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8961

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY PANAMA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MANAGUA 0423

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PARM, PFOR, PGOV, CU, BH, BH, GT, HO, ES, US, AO, CS, NU

SUBJECT: REGIONAL STUDY ON CONVENTIONAL ARMS SUPPLY RESTRAINTS

REF: STATE 015423 (DTG 220020Z JAN 76)

SUMMARY: NICARAGUA IS ALREADY INTERESTED IN CONVENTIONAL ARMS LIMITATION ON CENTRAL AMERICAN BASIS. EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT SUB-REGIONAL APPROACH MERITS DISCRETE EXPLORATION. CHANCES FOR ARMS LIMITATIONS MIGHT IMPROVE IF BORDER DISPUTES ARE RESOLVED AND THE US REAFFIRMS COMMITMENT ON CUBAN INTERVENTION CONTINGENCY. END SUMMARY

1. PRESIDENT SOMOZA PUT HIMSELF ON RECORD AT THE CENTRAL AMERICAN PRESIDENTS' MEETING IN GUATEMALA LAST OCTOBER THAT HE FAVORED AN ARMS LIMITATION AGREEMENT. HE IS CONCERNED LEST THE EL SALVADOR/HONDURAS ARMS COMPETITION ERODE A PRESENTLY ACCEPTABLE POWER SITUATION VIS-A-VIS HIS TWO NEIGHBORS.

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HE DOES NOT DESIRE TO COMPROMISE HIS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS OR UNDER-

MINE HIS ECONOMIC SITUATION IN GENERAL BY BEING OBLIGED TO COMPETE IN THIS AREA. HE IS SIMILARLY CONCERNED THAT ARMS PURCHASES BY HIS NEIGHBORS WILL DEPRESS WAGES THERE AND THEREBY DECREASE NICARAGUA'S MANUFACTURING COST COMPETITIVENESS. SOMOZA HAS ALSO FOLLOWED POLICY TOWARDS THE NATIONAL GUARD OF GIVING THEM ONLY THE BARE MINIMUM NECESSARY TO DO THE JOB AND THEREBY DISCOURAGING THE SUBSTITUTION OF A PROFESSIONAL MILITARY SPIRIT FOR PERSONAL LOYALTY TO HIMSELF. NICARAGUA HAS BEEN RESTRAINED IN THE PAST BY PLACING ITS TRUST IN COLLECTIVE SECURITY, BUT PARTICULARLY IN THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THE US WOULD INTERPOSE ITSELF IN ANY ATTEMPT BY AN EXTERNAL COMMUNIST POWER TO ESTABLISH ITSELF IN NICARAGUA. SOMOZA WOULD BE WILLING TO CONSIDER PROPOSALS PRAGMATICALLY.

2. IN SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING AN ARMS LIMITATION AGREEMENT, NICARAGUA WOULD HAVE TO FACE UP TO THE FACT THAT MUCH OF THE NATIONAL GUARD'S EQUIPMENT IS BADLY OUT OF DATE AND SOME MODERNIZATION WOULD HAVE TO TAKE PLACE. NICARAGUA IS ALREADY BEHIND TWO OF ITS NEIGHBORS IN SOME AREAS AND THERE ARE NORMAL PRESSURES TO REDUCE THE GAP. THE PROSPECT OF CUBA, EITHER SPONSORING AN INTERNAL SUBVERSIVE MOVEMENT OF UNPREDICTABLE MAGNITUDE, OR COMMITTING ITSELF TO DIRECT INTERVENTION WOULD BE A SERIOUS OBSTACLE TO AN AGREEMENT.

3. SUB-REGIONAL APPROACHES. THE POSSIBILITY OF ACHIEVING AGREEMENT ON CONVENTIONAL ARMS RESTRAINT IS WORTH EXPLORING IN CENTRAL AMERICA. FACTORS FAVORING AN AGREEMENT MAY BE SOMEWHAT STRONGER AND OBSTACLES IN THE PATH OF SUCH UNDERSTANDINGS MAY BE SOMEWHAT LESS IMPORTANT IN CENTRAL AMERICA THAN ELSEWHERE. FOR EXAMPLE:

---TRADITIONAL SUSPICIONS AND RIVALRY AMONG THE FIVE HAVE BEEN RADICALLY REDUCED IN THE PAST DECADE. EVEN SALVADOR/HONDURAS HAVE CORDIAL RELATIONS AT THE SUMMIT DESPITE THEIR LACK OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS.

---NONE OF THE FIVE HAVE PRETENSIONS TO POWER.

---FOUR OF THE COUNTRIES HAVE SIMILAR IDEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION. THE TRADITIONAL IDEOLOGICALLY PLAGUED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NICARAGUA AND COSTA RICA HAS GIVEN WAY TO A COURTEOUS MODUS VIVENDI WHICH SEEMS LIKELY TO CONTINUE.

---THE MILITARY LEADERSHIP OF FOUR COUNTRIES IS INVOLVED DEEPLY IN THE PRIME GOVERNMENTAL TASKS OF DEVELOPMENT WHICH TENDS TO DIMINISH CONFIDENTIAL

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THE FACTOR OF ARMAMENT FOR PRESTIGE PURPOSES. MOREOVER, THE CONSTANT CONSULTATION AMONG THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY LEADERS OF THE FIVE HAVE PROVIDED EACH WITH GREATER INSIGHT AND EMPATHY CONCERNING THE PROBLEMS OF THE OTHERS. IT HAS ALSO PROMOTED GREATER MUTUAL TRUST AMONG THE LEADERSHIP, THE MOST ESSENTIAL BASIC FACTOR IN REACHING AN AGREEMENT OF THIS NATURE. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE GUATEMALAN-BELIZE DISPUTE PRESENTS SPECIAL PROBLEMS WHICH, UNTIL RESOLVED, EFFECTIVELY PRECLUDE ANY

AGREEMENT. THE EL SALVADOR-HONDURAS DISPUTE IS ALSO A SERIOUS IMPEDIMENT TO REACHING MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING AMONG THE FIVE. PRESUMABLY AND REAL PROGRESS IN THIS DIRECTION MUST AWAIT THE RESOLUTION OF BOTH CONFLICTS.

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ARAE-00 INRE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00

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PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 EB-07 OMB-01 TRSE-00 MC-02

ACDA-05 AID-05 IGA-02 COME-00 /073 W

----- 065697

O R 281343Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8962

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

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AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 MANAGUA 0423

4. PRESIDENT SOMOZA HAS ALREADY REGISTERED HIS CONCERN ABOUT A WEAPONS BUILDUP IN EL SALVADOR AND HONDURAS BOTH PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY. WHATEVER HIS MOTIVES AND HOWEVER VAGUE HIS PROPOSALS, HE HAS AT LEAST BEEN IDENTIFIED WITH THE IDEA. A US INITIATIVE ON THE MATTER MIGHT NOT BE ACCEPTABLE IN SOME COUNTRIES BUT INVOLVEMENT OF A REGIONAL LEADER LIKE SOMOZA MIGHT BE POSSIBLE. THE US COULD RAISE WITH SOMOZA THE QUESTION OF THE FEASIBILITY OF CONVENTIONAL ARMS LIMITATION IN CENTRAL AMERICA. IN THE EVENT HE AGREED TO TEST THE NOTION, THE US COULD STRENGTHEN HIS POSITION BY SUGGESTING, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT WE WOULD BE WILLING TO CONSIDER FAVORABLY A REQUEST FROM THE FIVE FOR THE FINANCING OF AN AUTHORITATIVE THINK-TANK STUDY OF THE SUBJECT.

5. THE LARGEST IMPONDERABLE IS THE PROBLEM POSED BY CENTRAL

AMERICAN CONCERN ABOUT SOVIET-SUPPORTED CUBAN COMBAT INVOLVEMENT IN ANGOLA, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF CUBAN ESCALATION OF PRESENT LOW-LEVEL SUPPORT FOR REVOLUTIONARY VIOLENCE IN THE CENTRAL AMERICAN-CARIBBEAN REGION. NONE OF THE FIVE HAVE EVER
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POSTULATED THE KIND OF THREAT REPRESENTED BY THE SOVIET-SUPPORTED CUBAN INVASION OF ANGOLA AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THEIR DEFENSE PLANNING. GENERALLY, THE CENTRAL AMERICAN COUNTRIES LOOK TO THE RIO TREATY, AND, SPECIFICALLY, US PROTECTION TO HANDLE THIS KIND OF THREAT.

6. IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO ASSESS THE IMPACT OF THE ANGOLAN INTERVENTION ON CENTRAL AMERICAN DEFENSE PLANNING. SO FAR, HOWEVER, THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT THE FIVE ARE CONTEMPLATING A MAJOR INCREASE IN THEIR DEFENSE CAPABILITY TO DETER THE INVASION OF CUBAN COMBAT TROOPS. NICARAGUA IS CONCERNED ABOUT US VACILLATION IN ANGOLA, ESPECIALLY FOLLOWING VIETNAM, AND THIS CONCERN IS PROBABLY SHARED BY THE OTHER CENTRAL AMERICAN COUNTRIES. ANY ATTEMPT TO REACH A CENTRAL AMERICAN ARMS LIMITATION AGREEMENT WOULD LIKELY HAVE TO FACE THIS ISSUE. THE US WOULD BE ASKED TO CLARIFY THE EXTENT OF ITS COMMITMENT TO THE FIVE, IF ATTACKED BY CUBA.

7. SINCE OUTSTANDING BORDER DISPUTES AND THE PERCEPTION OF THE CUBAN THREAT ARE TWO MAJOR EXTERNAL STUMBLING BLOCKS, THE US SHOULD CONSIDER HOW THEY CAN BE REMOVED IN ORDER TO ESTABLISH PRECONDITIONS FOR AN ARMS LIMITATION AGREEMENT. SHOULD WE TERMINATE OUR MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM INCLUDING FMS CREDITS AND THE MILGP, WE WOULD PROBABLY LOSE WHATEVER LEVERAGE WE WOULD HAVE IN THIS AREA. WE ALSO RECOGNIZE THAT THERE ARE STRONGLY FELT LOCAL NEEDS FOR ARMS PURCHASES IN CENTRAL AMERICA, RELATED TO THE POLITICAL ROLE OF THE MILITARY, PRESTIGE AND OTHER FACTORS. THESE LOCAL NEEDS MAY BE SO COMPELLING, IN THE ABSENCE OF THE EXTERNAL OBSTACLES DISCUSSED ABOVE, THAT SOME CENTRAL AMERICAN COUNTRIES STILL WOULD BE RELUCTANT TO RESTRAIN THEIR ACQUISITION OF CONVENTIONAL ARMS.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: STUDIES, ARMS SHIPMENTS, MUNITIONS CONTROLS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 28 JAN 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: buchant0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976MANAGU00423
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760032-0698
From: MANAGUA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760114/aaaaalua.tel
Line Count: 210
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 STATE 15423
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: buchant0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 20 JAN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <20 JAN 2004 by morefirh>; APPROVED <21 OCT 2004 by buchant0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: REGIONAL STUDY ON CONVENTIONAL ARMS SUPPLY RESTRAINTS
TAGS: PARM, PFOR, PGOV, CU, BH, GT, HO, ES, US, AO, CS, NU
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006